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Frederic J. Fleron, Jr.
Erik P. Hoffmann
Edward W. Walker

**WHITHER
POST-SOVIETOLOGY?**

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WHITHER POST-SOVIETOLOGY?

PROCEEDINGS OF A WORKSHOP HELD AT THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE,
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THE HARRIMAN INSTITUTE • Columbia University in the City of New York
420 West 118 Street • 12th Floor • New York, New York 10027

COMPARATIVE POLITICS AND LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

Frederic J. Fleron, Jr.

Nearly three years ago in February 1990, Erik Hoffmann and I addressed members of the Harriman Institute on the subject of "Sovietology and Perestroika: Methodology and Lessons from the Past." Those remarks were elaborated in the September 1991 issue of *The Harriman Institute Forum* and are expanded in our essays in *Post-Communist Studies and Political Science*.¹ The historical context of those earlier remarks was the month in which the CPSU Central Committee formally voted to end the Party's monopoly of political power through the repeal of Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution. The intellectual context was Martin Malia's attack on the utility of the social sciences to say much of anything useful about the understanding of our subject.² The historical context has, of course, been dramatically altered by the tectonic shifts (to use a fashionable phrase) since August 1991. The purpose of the present remarks is not to assess the shift in historical context, but rather to make some modest contribution to an assessment of the intellectual context for comprehending our subject.

There will be no attempt here to assign responsibility for why we did or did not (could or could not) predict either *perestroika* or the collapse of the USSR. Probably more than enough has already been said on those questions by Martin Malia, Richard Pipes, Robert Conquest, Ken Jowitt, Theodore Draper,

and others.³ And no doubt more negative assessments of the field will appear in the future, despite George Breslauer's "In Defense of Sovietology."⁴ There are underway a number of reassessments, in particular the series of workshops sponsored by the Kennan Institute, the recent Title VIII Workshop at the U.S. Department of State, and this colloquium of The Harriman Institute.

Whether or not one agrees with the proposition that the Soviet Union was an historically unique phenomenon and therefore not an appropriate subject matter for the concepts, theories, and methods of mainstream social science, it is a fact of life that Sovietology was outside of that mainstream for much of its existence. After an initial linkage by the distinguished social scientists associated with the Harvard Refugee Interview Project in the 1950s, there was a decade-long hiatus during which Sovietologists went their own way. Then, in the late 1960s, there began some explicit efforts to cross the chasm that had developed. Those early efforts began slowly and hesitantly, usually with only passing reference (and those usually only in footnotes) to social science literature. This was followed by a progression of efforts to employ social science terms in the study of the Soviet Union and other communist regimes. At a more sophisticated level came efforts to test propositions and theories extant

1 Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. and Erik P. Hoffmann (eds.), *Post-Communist Studies and Political Science: Methodology and Empirical Theory in Sovietology* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, forthcoming March 1993).

2 Martin Malia, "To the Stalin Mausoleum," *Daedalus*, 119, 1 (Winter, 1990), p. 298.

3 Martin Malia, "To the Stalin Mausoleum"; Martin Malia, "From Under the Rubble, What?" *Problems of Communism*, 41, 1-2 (January-April, 1992), pp. 89-106; Richard Pipes, "Russia's Chance," *Commentary*, 93, 3 (March, 1992), p. 33; Robert Conquest, "Getting Communism Wrong," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 15, 1992; Theodore Draper, "Who Killed Soviet Communism?" *The New York Review of Books*, June 11, 1992, pp. 7-14; Ken Jowitt, "Weber, Trotsky and Holmes on the Study of Leninist Regimes," *Journal of International Affairs*, 45, 1 (Summer, 1991), pp. 31-49.

4 George W. Breslauer, "In Defense of Sovietology," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 8, 3 (July-September, 1992), pp. 197-238.

in the social sciences. And occasionally there have been a few explicit engagements of the methodological (logic of inquiry) issues common to the social sciences, indeed common to all scientific inquiry. The following remarks fall into the last category: the logic of inquiry in Sovietology and post-Sovietology, with particular reference to comparative politics.

There is no intention here to debate methodological issues in philosophy of science; that is better left to the philosophers of science. Rather we will apply some of these methodological principles to Sovietology in an effort to offer some guidelines for the present out of lessons from the past. We proceed under the assumption, baldly stated here at the outset, that Sovietologists need to be explicitly and self-consciously aware of certain minimal (and, in many other quarters, generally accepted) requirements for the systematic cumulativeness of knowledge. This theme was suggested by a recent argument of Harry Eckstein when he wrote:

Political science is at present overrun with basic concepts,... proposed bases for building theories, and would-be paradigms for the field. If ever there was time for consolidation, for sorting things out in the field's blooming, buzzing confusion, it is now.... [T]he literature grows and grows. But growth is accumulation, not "cumulativeness" in the scholarly sense. Accumulation, as it now occurs, threatens to split political science into rigid, warring "schools"—if it has not irreversibly done so already. Cumulativeness proceeds gradually toward shared and surer understanding.⁵

Much of what Eckstein writes about the discipline of political science applies to Sovietology as well. The creation of knowledge in our field has been characterized by accumulation more than cumulativeness. At no time has this been more evident than during the explosion of Western scholarly literature on the Soviet Union since the arrival of Gorbachev on the scene. All sorts of social science concepts from "civil society" and "political culture" to Albert Hirschman's "exit" and "voice" were

thrown at the rapidly changing Soviet scene with precious little effort to test propositions from the theories that generated them. The following discussion will offer some suggestions for altering that situation.

THEORY: LEVELS OF ABSTRACTION

In response to the first round of criticism and indictment of Sovietology for, among other things, its failure to predict either the emergence of Gorbachev or the demise of the Soviet Union, some more temperate voices are beginning to be heard and more balanced views set forth. George Breslauer, for example, has recently concluded from an analysis of the history of Sovietology that it was more diverse and ecumenical than previously portrayed.⁶ The focus of Breslauer's study was an assessment of macro-level theories and images of the Soviet future in mainstream Sovietology, with special reference to the literature produced in the 1950s through the 1970s. This is a useful antidote to arguments that Sovietology was dominated by the "totalitarian model" (Cohen⁷) or misguided by Western social science categories (Pipes and Malia⁸). Nonetheless, one still comes away with the feeling that Sovietologists have behaved more like "a group of hyperoriginal soloists" whose efforts, for the most part, have not led "to progress in building sound macropolitical theory, instead of pointless, even massive, accretion."⁹

Perhaps a useful lesson can be drawn here from a passage expressing Harry Eckstein's exasperation with grand theories in political science:

After all, they played the central role in the field. Some of them also certainly were clever, based on erudition, and made for good discussion. But the whole enterprise seemed to me barren because it seemed to have things upside down. One does not, godlike, create a "normal science" out of chaos. Where such a thing exists it grows from the bottom up, through the results of narrower inquiries; broad theories

5 Harry Eckstein, "Foreword," in Paul V. Warwick, *Culture, Structure, or Choice? Essays in the Interpretation of the British Experience* (NY: Agathon Press, 1990), p. vii.

6 Breslauer, "In Defense of Sovietology," p. 200.

7 Stephen F. Cohen, "Scholarly Missions: Sovietology as a Vocation," in his *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics & History Since 1917* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 3-37.

8 See references to their works in note 3, plus Richard Pipes, *Survival is Not Enough* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 24.

9 Eckstein, "Foreword," p. x.

are developed to subsume narrower theories rather than the narrower theories simply being elaborations of a priori broader theories. Still broader theories are developed in the same way. Grand theories I regarded, and still regard, as ultimate and probably unattainable ends. In other words I opted to work on what Merton called theories of the middle range.¹⁰

Once again, much of this applies to Sovietology as well. As Breslauer demonstrates, grand theories have most certainly played a central role in the field and Sovietology tended to proceed from the top down rather than from the bottom up. But perhaps Breslauer spends too much time sorting out grand and broad-gauged theories in his defense of Sovietology. In that respect his defense may be misplaced. Whether or not Breslauer is correct, there can be little doubt that Sovietology has a poor record at the level of middle-range theory and the related activities of proposition testing and replication.

In another recent call for bringing Soviet studies into the mainstream of comparative politics, William Odom suggested that "early efforts to achieve this failed because they aspired much too early or were attempted at the wrong level of generality."¹¹ They were cast at too broad a level of abstraction; hence, "most of them can be better analyzed with concepts from organization theory"¹²—that is, from theories of the middle range. Perhaps so, but Odom then proceeds to argue that "the old totalitarian model could have been richly supplemented by numerous 'theories of the middle range'"¹³ in order to strengthen some of its weaknesses as an explanatory device, namely its inability to account for change. Odom's interest in middle-range theory is not motivated by Eckstein's desire to create normal science out of chaos, but rather to rescue the broad-gauged totalitarian "macromodel." Hence, he too appears to be caught in the "old thinking" of a top-down approach.

PROPOSITIONAL INVENTORIES

A rich core of propositional inventories could provide a most useful starting point for efforts to fill the gaps at this intermediate level and, thereby, also contribute to cumulativeness rather than mere accumulation. Each new generation of students would have readily available a starting point for research, rather than having to pour over the accumulated wisdom collected in stout books and thick journals. There must be a more efficient use of "scholar power." If lack of propositional inventories was not a major impediment to research in the past, it is likely to become one before long, given the explosion of empirical field research in the former Soviet Union and other post-communist societies. How will we keep track of it all? The situation will come to resemble what mathematicians call "Ulam's Dilemma" (after Stanislaw Ulam, the mathematician; not his brother Adam, the Sovietologist): nearly 200,000 theorems per year are published in mathematical journals and there appear to be few, if any, rational principles agreed upon by mathematicians to sort through them and decide which ones are valuable and which are not. In their survey of the mathematical landscape, Philip J. Davis and Reuben Hirsch asked: "Can we try to establish some rational principles by which one could sort through 200,000 theorems a year? Or should we simply accept that there is no more need to choose among theorems than to choose among species of insects?"¹⁴ They concluded that "neither course is entirely satisfactory." To make matters worse, "unavoidable problems of daily mathematical practice lead to fundamental questions of epistemology and ontology, but most professionals have learned to bypass such questions as irrelevant."¹⁵ In the past, Sovietologists have also tended to view such questions as irrelevant. Continuation of that practice is fraught with the danger of increased irrelevance.

Much of the new empirical field research will increasingly be done by scholars not previously associated with the arcane field of Sovietology and the fruits of their efforts will no doubt be published

10 Harry Eckstein, *Regarding Politics: Essays on Political Theory, Stability, and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 7.

11 William E. Odom, "Soviet Politics and After: Old and New Concepts," *World Politics*, 45, 1 (October, 1992), p. 68.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

14 Philip J. Davis and Reuben Hirsch, *The Mathematical Experience* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), p. 23.

15 *Ibid.*

in mainstream social science journals, some (or many) of which may not be familiar territory to Sovietologists. The current field research on Soviet political culture—to be discussed below—is a case in point. Wisdom dictates that we quickly set about to establish mechanisms by which this knowledge can be efficiently disseminated. Over the years a number of Sovietologists have been heard to say that they don't read or subscribe to the *American Political Science Review*, *The Journal of Politics*, or *Comparative Politics* because those journals simply are not relevant to our concerns. We continue that pattern of behavior at our own peril, for it is no longer the case that we can simply talk to each other. The time has come when social scientists not steeped in Russian/Soviet area studies are systematically studying our subject. How will we respond?

One concrete suggestion for moving us toward cumulativeness and away from mere accumulation is the compilation and publication of propositional inventories—a major and systematic stock-taking of our knowledge base. More than twenty years ago, this writer made a similar suggestion to the ACLS Planning Group on Comparative Communist Studies (of which he was a member), but that suggestion fell on deaf ears. But imagine how much better off we would now be if that suggestion had been accepted and acted upon back in 1970. It would have directed us more toward cumulativeness and away from accumulation (to use Eckstein's distinction). Indeed, we are now going about the process of cataloguing the decades of accumulated works as we subject Sovietology to *samokritika*, but so far this has been done in only hit-or-miss fashion. A recent compendium of four decades of political science research on the USSR and Eastern Europe merely identifies some trends, and is at least as noteworthy for its omissions as for its inclusions.¹⁶ An important contribution that centers of post-Soviet studies (such as The Harriman Institute) can make is to require their graduate students to compile propositional inventories of discrete areas of research as part of their regular course work. Useful models are Lester W. Milbrath's propositional inventory on political participation and Barry E. Collins and Harold Guetzkow's

propositional inventory on group processes in decision-making.¹⁷ The results of these graduate student efforts (coordinated and even contributed to by faculty) could be made available to the profession through subscribed newsletters similar to *The Harriman Institute Forum* and subsequently published in book form.

Of course, the creation of such propositional inventories is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the advancement of a discipline; rather, it is a systematic cataloguing of that discipline's knowledge. What surely is necessary (and perhaps also sufficient) is a change in the culture of the discipline: does it strive for "cumulativeness," or the mere accumulation of knowledge? Propositional inventories could prove to be an invaluable stimulus for steering us in the direction of middle-range theory and, hence, cumulativeness. The use of the concept "political culture" in Sovietology illustrates the need for increased methodological rigor and the types of contributions that are currently being made to test middle-range theory.

POLITICAL CULTURE AS PHLOGISTON

One of the most serious problems encountered in our literature is that many key concepts have a multitude of meanings and referents. "Political culture" is a concept that has been much used and abused by Sovietologists over the years, and thus can be singled out to illustrate some of our basic methodological errors and confusions. A rather casual perusal of the literature over the course of several months by this writer yielded more than four-score characteristics or attributes of Russian/Soviet political culture, not counting multiple references to the same attribute. In most cases it was unclear whether an author was treating them as defining or accompanying characteristics. It is difficult to conceive of how we should go about testing propositions from theories that employ political culture as an independent, dependent, or intervening variable when that concept has such multiple and diverse meanings. For, as Harry Eckstein observed in a prescient passage: "It stands to

16 Raymond C. Taras (ed.), *Handbook of Political Science Research on the USSR and Eastern Europe: Trends from the 1950s to the 1990s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992).

17 Lester Milbrath, *Political Participation: How and Why People Get Involved in Politics* (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 1965; 2nd revised edition with M. L. Goel [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1977]). Barry E. Collins and Harold Guetzkow, *A Social Psychology of Group Processes for Decision-Making* (NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964).

reason that, if a concept is encumbered with many meanings, theories using it also will vary alarmingly because they are not about the same thing."¹⁸

Another serious problem that has plagued use of the concept "political culture" in the study of Soviet politics is that it has been used to explain phenomena that otherwise cannot be explained. Eckstein observed that "the muddle about the meaning" of some concepts starts "with a strange inversion of the proper and usual relations between concepts (labels), objects, and subjects."

Normally, one begins with observations or ideas (or both). Concepts are used to make statements about them: "messages" that convey information. In making statements, difficulties may arise. More or less misinformation, or "noise," may be conveyed. Unless conventional language has been seriously abused, the fault can hardly lie in the words. Messages will be unclear to the extent that observations or ideas are crude or fuzzy. To achieve greater clarity, it is usually not to the point to revise the definitions; the obvious remedies are more exact observation and more lucid thought. The exceptions that call for abandonment are concepts that turn out to be vacuous because they label ignorance itself—like "phlogiston" or "having the vapors."¹⁹

Political culture has been the phlogiston of Sovietology: the classic case of a concept that simultaneously captures everything and nothing. Alexander Dallin has identified an "essentialist" fallacy in some Western studies of Soviet foreign policy that "give undue weight to historiopolitical predispositions that, of late, have served far too generously as an ostensible master key to an understanding of Soviet conduct."

"Political culture" has repeatedly become the residual category that has served as the catch-basin for everything that could not otherwise be explained. In the Soviet case it has all too often been invoked by "essentialist" ideologists arguing—at times with massive erudi-

tion—a historical determinism: the Soviet Union, as it were, trapped by and unable to escape its own past.²⁰

The problem with such an essentialist view of political culture is that it cannot account for change in institutions, behavior, or in political culture itself. Indeed, the essentialist view raises very serious questions about the causal status of political culture as an explanatory device—that "a country's political culture provides both a necessary and sufficient explanation of the manner in which its political system operates."²¹ If we were to do so, argues Stephen White,

We should then be unable to account for the fact that political systems, in a variety of cases, have changed with a rapidity greatly in excess of that of any conceivable change in the political culture which underlies them; nor would we be able to explain the fact that apparent similarities in political culture, such as (if we are to believe Almond and Verba) in Britain and the USA, should give rise to political systems of a rather different character. We should equally be unable to account for any changes in the political culture itself.²²

These problems of continuity and change in political systems, as well as in political cultures themselves, are empirical questions that cannot be solved a priori, but only through careful empirical research.

TESTING EMPIRICAL THEORY: POLITICAL CULTURE

One of the most interesting questions nowadays is whether or not there exists in the territories of the former Soviet Union a political culture that is receptive to democracy to an extent that would sustain democratic institutions and processes. Two recent studies of political culture in the former USSR may help to shed some light on this question. Jeffrey Hahn (Villanova) interviewed a systematic random

18 Eckstein, *Regarding Politics*, p. 230. This writer made the same point more than a quarter century ago in Fleron, "Soviet Area Studies and the Social Sciences," pp. 11-19, esp. p. 19.

19 Ibid., p. 231.

20 Alexander Dallin, "The Domestic Sources of Soviet Foreign Policy," in Seweryn Bialer (ed.), *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), p. 356.

21 White, *Political Culture and Soviet Politics* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 19.

22 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

sample in Yaroslavl' in March 1990.²³ James Gibson et al. interviewed a multistage probability sample in Moscow Oblast during February-March 1990.²⁴ The questions employed in these surveys related to the following factors:

Hahn

Political efficacy
Political trust
Support for competitive elections
Political interest
Support for a multi-party system
Political knowledge

Gibson et al.

Support for competitive elections
Political tolerance
Valuation of liberty
Support for the norms of democracy
Rights consciousness
Support for dissent
Support for an independent media

With the exception of items related to support for competitive elections, these two surveys did not tap commensurable items. Hahn was concerned with factors related to "the way people think about politics" that "predisposes them to be receptive to democratic ideas and institutions."²⁵ Gibson et al. were more concerned with factors directly related to citizen support for democratic ideas and institutions. Here is what they concluded:

Hahn

Taken together, the findings presented thus far provide little support for the argument that continuity rather than change is the chief characteristic of Russian political culture. On all dimensions of political culture measured here—political efficacy, political trust, support for popular elections, political interest and knowledge—the evidence suggests that Rus-

sians come closer to what we find in Western industrial democracies than to what we would expect to find if the traditional cultural patterns ascribed to the period of Russian autocracy had persisted. While there do appear to be distinctive patterns of attitudes, values and beliefs in Russian political culture, which may be enduring, they do not appear to be so distinctive as to present an obstacle to the emergence and maintenance of democratic institutions. Certainly the conclusion that "Soviet political culture, formed over centuries of autocratic rule, provided a relatively weak base for the development of pluralistic politics" [White, *Gorbachev in Power*, p. 216] seems to be contradicted by what Russians think in Yaroslavl'.²⁶

Gibson et al.

How supportive are residents of the Moscow Oblast of basic democratic processes and institutions? While the picture that emerges from our analysis is less than crystal clear, generally, there is a remarkable level of support for democracy among these respondents. They are quite willing to claim a variety of rights as citizens, there is a consensus on democratic principles abstractly formulated, and liberty and dissent are reasonably highly valued. The single most significant exception to the generally broad support for democratic values is on the question of political tolerance for one's most hated political enemies.²⁷

To the extent that the findings and conclusions from these two studies can be generalized, they give considerable optimism for the prospects of both democracy and civic culture in post-Soviet Russia. They point in a very different direction than the bulk of accumulated evidence from decades of Sovietology that held out slim prospects for democracy as a result of ingrained elements of Russian political culture, many of which were reinforced during more than seven decades of Soviet rule. As the authors readily admit, however, their findings are suggestive and not conclusive. Therefore, we should observe caution and resist the temptation

23 Jeffrey W. Hahn, "Continuity and Change in Russian Political Culture," *British Journal of Political Science*, 21 (October, 1991), pp. 393-421. Reprinted in Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. and Erik P. Hoffmann (eds.), *Post-Communist Studies and Political Science: Methodology and Empirical Theory in Sovietology* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).
24 James L. Gibson, Raymond M. Duch, and Kent L. Tedin, "Democratic Values and the Transformation of the Soviet Union," *The Journal of Politics*, 54, 2 (May, 1992), pp. 329-71.
25 Hahn, "Continuity and Change in Russian Political Culture," p. 396.
26 Ibid., p. 416.
27 Gibson et al., "Democratic Values and the Transformation of the Soviet Union," pp. 352-53.

immediately to reject decades of scholarship that points to opposite conclusions. At the same time, we must take seriously the hard evidence of these new studies—evidence that is certainly less subject to interpretation than the anecdotal and impressionistic “evidence” of more traditional studies. In the spirit of cumulativeness, we can now proceed to build on these pioneering efforts in several ways. One direction takes the form of replication studies on different populations, especially in more rural areas where one would expect traditional values to have a stronger hold. Another direction is the exploration of aspects of political culture untapped by these new studies. The following remarks take the latter route.

1. *Opinions and the Emotive Appeal of Key Terms.* It would not be sufficient to ask citizens of the former USSR for their opinions regarding democracy. The existence of positive opinions could be grossly misleading for it could be asked if the respondents really understood the meaning of the terms democracy, free speech, multiparty system, etc. Do these terms have the same meaning in Russia as they do in Western democracies? To be sure, terms such as democracy have positive emotive value in Russia these days, but does it mean the same thing to them as it does in Western democratic societies? One is reminded here of a colleague's experience in a Chinese university about the time of the Tienanmen Massacre. Students there were wildly enthusiastic about American democracy as portrayed in his lectures. The colleague pressed them about their desire for democracy in China. They uniformly wanted it. Even “one-man, one-vote”? Oh yes, they replied. He then pointed out that that meant illiterate peasants from the hinterlands would have as much say in the voting booth as them—Westernized, urbanized, middle-class students. They then began to wonder about the advisability of democracy as practiced in America.

The lesson here is clear: certain words have strong positive emotive appeal. As a result, some

people may utter them simply because they are fashionable or politically correct.²⁸ Those who do utter them may not even remotely understand their meaning, let alone their consequences in practice. We have long known that many of the institutional trappings of democracy [elections, representative legislative bodies, etc.] in the USSR did not produce democracy there. We were on guard against superficial cross-national comparisons of Soviet and Western elections or legislatures because similarly named institutions do not necessarily perform the same functions in different societies. We should exercise the same caution regarding terms such as democracy and its associated phenomena. It was for this reason that Hahn placed less emphasis on Soviet citizens' opinions about democracy and more emphasis on attitudes, values, and beliefs that would be supportive of a more democratic political culture.

2. *Ideal vs. Real Cultural Patterns.*²⁹ Perhaps a more valid indicator of a democratic political culture is how people behave, not what they say. Hahn's research does not address this critical behavioral dimension; neither does that of Gibson, et al.³⁰ And this is precisely why we should employ an anthropological definition of “political culture,” rather than a psychological definition. The former includes both ideal and real cultural patterns, whereas the latter includes only the ideal. The pitfalls of the psychological approach can be illustrated by comparing Gibson et al.'s optimism about “few cultural impediments, at least in Moscow, to the further democratization of the USSR”³¹ to the shabby way in which some Moscow citizens were treated who wanted to propose names other than Yeltsin's for the first open democratic elections in spring 1989.

3. *General vs. Specific Beliefs.* Gibson et al. found a large gap between general and specific beliefs in their Moscow Oblast sample. “Citizens fairly strongly endorse general formulations of demo-

28 Commenting on their findings of positive affect toward democracy in their 1990 sample of Moscow citizens, Gibson et al. (p. 363) suggest that “one can imagine that Soviet citizens are doing no more than conforming to a new democratic orthodoxy, rather than fully embracing democratic processes and institutions.”

29 The utility of this distinction between ideal and real cultural patterns for Soviet studies was introduced by Robert C. Tucker in 1973 (“Culture, Political Culture, and Communist Society,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 88, 2 [June 1973], pp. 173-90) and reiterated twenty years later as an antidote to the ahistorical bent of much of Sovietology in the intervening time [“Sovietology and Russian History,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 8, 3 (1992), p. 190; “Foreword,” in Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. and Erik P. Hoffmann (eds.), *Post-Communist Studies and Political Science: Methodology and Empirical Theory in Sovietology* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993)].

30 Gibson et al., “Democratic Values and the Transformation of the Soviet Union,” p. 361.

31 Ibid.

cratic values, but many fail to support the application of the values to specific, conflictual cases."³² They note, however, that this pattern of divergence is quite similar to that found in studies of U.S. citizens. In other words, they argue, such divergence is not necessarily a fatal flaw in maintaining a democratic political culture. But, quite clearly, this divergence between general and specific beliefs requires further investigation to determine whether or not it also represents a divergence between ideal and real cultural patterns.

4. *Abstract Ideas vs. Ideas Embodied in Social Processes.* A related distinction is that between abstract ideas and ideas embodied in social processes, e.g., machine technology and the actual processes involved in the use of a particular machine technology in a particular sociocultural context. This was precisely the point I had in mind nearly twenty years ago when I suggested that the transfer of machine technology to the USSR from the Western capitalist democracies was probably more subversive of communist systems than were abstract Western ideas.³³ The factors that many authors increasingly link to Soviet citizens' receptivity to a more democratic political culture are factors that result from modernization and the use of modern technology (much of it imported from advanced capitalist countries). Both studies discussed here considered such factors as increased education, social pluralism resulting from increased functional specialization and structural differentiation, etc. In a more recent study, Gibson and Duch labelled these as "broad macro-level changes" that "have set the stage for the democratization of the culture."³⁴ But they go on to argue that "an important source of modernization is the importation of ideas."³⁵

Without necessarily accepting Fukuyama's thesis that history has ended, it is possible to argue that support for democratic values has emerged in the USSR through the importation of ideas from the West and the remainder of the world. Democracy may not have indigenous roots in the USSR, but may have traveled over the airwaves. If we accept the modernization

argument that worldwide communications systems have affected (and connected) nearly every part of the globe, then it is sensible to hypothesize that diffusion processes have contributed to the democratization of individual Soviet citizens. Thus, we hypothesize that those with greater awareness of Western politics are more likely to hold democratic values.³⁶

There is a basic error in this argument. It assumes that people will accept certain ideas simply as a result of those ideas being presented to them, in this case through the media of modern technology. They leave out an important step, namely, what was it that rendered those citizens receptive to those ideas in the first place? Following modernization theory, one would argue that it was the social consequences of the modernization process itself: increased functional specialization and structural differentiation created more and specialized interests in society; those interests wanted greater access to the political system; the interest intermediation structures and processes of the Soviet political system did not give them adequate access to decision-making; hence, they were receptive to alternative forms of interest intermediation, etc. If this is the case, then one would expect to find genuine receptivity to democracy (i.e., at the levels of both ideal and real cultural patterns) primarily among those citizens occupying positions in society that were created by the modernization process. Conversely, one would not expect to find such receptivity to democracy among segments of Soviet society relatively unaffected by modernization. Among the latter, one would find greater affinity to traditional values of Russian political culture as described in the traditional literature of Sovietology.

5. *More General Cultural Patterns.* Even within the framework of attitudinal analysis, it is important to take note of more general cultural patterns that are supportive of democracy. Ronald Inglehart affirms that: "With rising levels of economic development, cultural patterns that are supportive of democracy become increasingly likely to prevail."³⁷ Education

32 Ibid., p. 343.

33 See Introduction and Afterword to Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. (ed.), *Technology and Communist Culture: The Socio-Cultural Impact of Technology under Socialism* (NY: Praeger, 1977); and "The Western Connection: Technical Rationality and Soviet Politics," *Soviet Union*, 4, 1 (1977), pp. 58-84.

34 James L. Gibson and Raymond M. Duch, "The Origins of a Democratic Culture in the Soviet Union: Modeling the Acquisition of Democratic Values," Unpublished ms. Version 2.1, p. 7.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., pp. 7-8.

seems to be an important intervening variable in this process. Hahn concurs: "Education is the critical intervening variable between development and political culture."³⁸ He goes on to argue that "Soviet economic development resulted in an increasingly well-educated population and that those with a higher level of education think differently about political life than those without. Specifically, they are more receptive to democratic institutions and values."³⁹ But Hahn does not offer an explanation of why this is the case.

A more recent study by Gibson and Duch explores this issue further. In their view, increased educational level has a two-pronged positive impact on the acquisition of values supportive of democracy: cognitive and substantive. Hence, "the effect of education on the acquisition of democratic values is more than a cognitive process; it may also involve the social learning that takes place within educational institutions."⁴⁰

On the cognitive side of the equation, Gibson and Duch explore the connection between education and rigidity and between cognitive sophistication and political tolerance. They build on the findings of Samuel C. Stouffer's landmark 1955 study⁴¹ to the effect that "education tends to reduce the rigidity with which individuals categorize objects in the political environment. Education tends to force individuals to develop normative continua rather than dichotomies."⁴² To be sure, Stouffer's findings were based on a study of the United States; but, to the extent that education does tend to reduce rigidity, it can thereby help to overcome one of the central aspects of traditional Russian culture that so many Sovietologists have argued over the years is an impediment to a democratic political culture.⁴³

The second dimension explored on the cognitive side of the equation is the connection between cognitive sophistication and political tolerance. For the

first time in Western studies of the Soviet system, Gibson and Duch empirically test propositions related to the structure of belief systems. Kelly and Fleron argued for the centrality of this issue in the study of Soviet belief-disbelief systems more than two decades ago, although they recognized that practical limitations on data collection at the time meant that consideration of that relevant variable had to be postponed.⁴⁴ Gibson and Duch found that although "alienation from the current political system stands out as the best predictor of support for democratic values," closedmindedness (an important dimension of the structure of belief-disbelief systems used by Milton Rokeach⁴⁵) constituted "another strong predictor of democratic values." "We believe the effect of closedmindedness is primarily in terms of its impact on openness to political change. Those who are dogmatic are less likely to accept reform, especially radical and unpredictable reform. This relationship points to the important role that psychological attributes can play in the political process."⁴⁶ An interesting and crucial question for the transformation of political culture that emerges from these findings concerns the extent to which these psychological attributes have been conditioned (reinforced) by cultural factors. Exploration of this question could be an exciting focus of future research.

On the substantive side of the equation, the connection between education and the acquisition of values supportive of democracy is equally important:

(1) "individuals with higher education are more likely to be exposed to and socialized into accepting officially sanctioned norms promoting democratic values."⁴⁷

37 Ronald Inglehart, "Economic Development, Cultural Change and Democratization: A Global Perspective," Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, unpublished ms. dated September 1, 1992, p. 1. See also Gibson and Duch, "The Origins of a Democratic Culture in the Soviet Union," pp. 5-8.

38 Hahn, "Continuity and Change in Russian Political Culture," p. 417.

39 Ibid., pp. 418-19.

40 Gibson and Duch, "The Origins of a Democratic Culture in the Soviet Union," p. 10.

41 Samuel C. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (NY: Doubleday, 1955).

42 Gibson and Duch, "The Origins of a Democratic Culture in the Soviet Union," p. 7.

43 One of the many contributions of the studies by Hahn, Gibson et al., and Gibson and Duch is that they relate their findings and conclusions to both the general social science literature and that of mainstream Sovietology. As a result, they are contributing to the cumulation of knowledge.

44 Rita Mae Kelly and Frederic J. Fleron, Jr., "Personality, Behavior, and Communist Ideology," *Soviet Studies*, 21, 3 (January, 1970), pp. 297-313. Reprinted in Erik P. Hoffmann and Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. (eds.), *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy* (NY: Aldine, 1980), pp. 191-211. An expanded version was also published in Roger E. Kanet (ed.), *The Behavioral Revolution and Communist Studies: Applications of Behaviorally Oriented Political Research on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (NY: The Free Press, 1971), pp. 53-77.

45 Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind* (NY: Basic Books, 1960).

46 Gibson and Duch, "The Origins of a Democratic Culture in the Soviet Union," p. 22.

47 Ibid., p. 9.

(2) "education may inherently instill or reinforce liberal values such as equality, tolerance, and respect for individual liberties."⁴⁸

(3) Indeed, Gibson and Duch cite evidence to suggest that in the former USSR "education contributes to support for democratic norms, regardless of formal system norms."⁴⁹

These are some of the important and exciting directions of contemporary empirical research on political culture and value systems in post-Soviet politics. Its significance is great, for a realistic assessment of the likelihood of transition to democracy in Russia is at stake. The conduct of that research requires much more than expertise in a geographic area; it also requires expertise in social science theory, methods, and research techniques. If the graduates of our centers of advanced training in post-Soviet studies are to be enabled to critique, replicate, and/or build on these pioneering studies, they will have to receive appropriate training encompassing both generalist and specialist skills.

CONCLUSION

I will conclude these necessarily brief remarks with seven specific recommendations for bringing some order to the house of post-Sovietology.

1. *Concept Inventories*: The identification of central concepts employed in the study of Soviet politics and an inventory of the myriad definitions and meanings of these terms may be a necessary first step in getting our conceptual house in order. The fact that a key concept such as "Soviet political culture" has literally scores of definitions is indicative of the disarray and ambiguity at the level of basic concepts.

2. *Concept Explications*: Once we have identified the key concepts and inventoried their definitions, we will be in a better position to explicate these concepts. We have thrown a number of concepts at our subject with precious little attention to the clarification and explication of those concepts. Some collective and collegial attention to this matter

seems very much in order. For example, one may or may not agree with Giovanni Sartori's conclusions regarding the current utility of the concept "totalitarianism," but he has taken us a long way toward a much clearer understanding of the proper logical status and methodological function of that concept.⁵⁰

3. *Propositional Inventories*: I have already made the case for propositional inventories and their potential merit for moving us from accumulation to cumulativeness.

4. *Workshops on Theory*: Centers of advanced training in post-Soviet affairs such as The Harriman Institute could take the lead in exploring the extent to which particular areas of substantive social science theory seem relevant and useful—not just the concepts, but the theories and the various propositions contained therein: e.g., political culture, political socialization, political participation, institutionalization, regime transition, comparative ethnicity, etc. Those centers could usefully sponsor series of workshops—not one-shot affairs, but working groups of faculty (and graduate students) that would meet several times a year over several years. This is what Carl Beck and several others (including this writer) did at the University of Pittsburgh in the late 1960s and early 1970s resulting in the publication of *Comparative Communist Political Leadership*.⁵¹

5. *Summer Workshops*: NEH and ACLS/SSRC sponsor a number of workshops each summer for purposes of bringing college faculty, high school teachers, and advanced graduate students up-to-speed on recent substantive and theoretical developments in a number of areas of knowledge and inquiry. Those at the cutting edge—the leading centers of post-Soviet and post-communist studies in this country—should exercise leadership in this regard.

6. *Curriculum*: Who knows what is being taught about Communism and post-Communist affairs in America's colleges and universities? We need a survey of college and university offerings in these

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., p. 10.

50 Giovanni Sartori, "Totalitarianism, Model Mania and Learning from Error," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 5, 1 (1993), pp. 5-22.

51 NY: David McKay Co., 1973.

areas plus a collection of course syllabi that could be made available to colleagues in the profession.

7. *Textbooks*: The generation of textbooks for our field (as with most others) has been left to the marketplace. Perhaps that is as it should be, but it would be useful to have some comprehensive analyses of existing texts in various areas of the field. In the past, we have shown precious little interest in the pedagogical dimensions of our trade, perhaps to the point of collective irresponsibility.

Facing these and other challenges in post-Sovietology will require the collective and creative efforts of scholars, centers for advanced research and train-

ing, professional associations, funding institutions, and the informed public.

*Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. is Professor of Political Science, State University of New York at Buffalo. He is editor of *Communist Studies and the Social Sciences* (1969) and *Technology and Communist Culture* (1977); co-editor of *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy* (1980), *Soviet Foreign Policy: Classic and Contemporary Issues* (1991), and *Post-Communist Studies and Political Science* (1993); co-author of *Comparative Communist Political Leadership* (1973), and author of several articles in political science and Soviet studies journals. He is currently writing *Communist and Post-Communist Studies: Reflections and Explorations*.*

NURTURING POST-SOVIETOLOGY: SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Erik P. Hoffmann

Post-Sovietology is in its infancy, and its toddler years will influence its development for decades to come. The genes of its parents—Soviet and Russian studies—are powerful and distinctive. And Mr. Yeltsin's neighborhood is dramatically different from the environment in which generations of Sovietologists grew up. So the choices researchers make today will have enormous intellectual and policy ramifications. Also, "nondecisions" are decisions. Inertia in our thinking and behavior as well as deficiencies in our talents and efforts will have an impact. Both the problems and opportunities for scholars and policy advisers have never been greater. Demand for post-Sovietologists is up, the supply is limited, resources are down, competition for these resources is keen, and recriminations about past performance are part of this competition. Many new players are on the field, and the terrain is uncertain for participants and observers alike. Our profession is at a decisive turning point: the challenges are unprecedented, the stakes are immense, and the results are anybody's guess.

What follows is a mixture of commentary and recommendations. It is offered in the spirit of constructive coping, not as preaching. Our research criteria and standards need to be reassessed but must be judged by deeds, not creeds.

Description

More description, fact finding, and data gathering are essential to an understanding of the former Soviet Union (FSU). We simply do not know what is going on in many geographical and issue areas today. And political leaders, institutions, institutional relationships, professions, movements, so-

cioeconomic conditions, and even cultures are changing rapidly in most parts of the FSU. The whys and hows are intriguing, but the whats and whos must come first. For example, written sources, telecommunications, and interview opportunities abound. But what printed materials should we read and recommend for translation? What television programs have what kind of influence on what audiences? Whose opinions are important or reliable on a given subject? Not surprisingly, we tend to answer these questions on the basis of our intuition and experience, which include little theoretical grounding, cross-national comparison, or technically sophisticated field research.

The microeconomists, sociologists, geographers, anthropologists, linguists, and cultural historians we never bothered to train are sorely needed now. The view from the bottom has proven to be at least as important as the view from the top. True, we can get some help from the public opinion polls conducted by researchers living in the FSU countries. And the work of native geographers, ethnologists, jurists, entrepreneurs, and political observers can advance our factual knowledge beyond that of a paleontologist or archaeologist. But mere description of existing realities would constitute progress. Fuller description is essential to a rudimentary mapping or classification of a large number of interconnected variables.

These variables include the international relations of the FSU countries and portentous new structures, policies, and trends in the global arena, such as the emergence of huge regional trading blocs, the rise of Muslim and Orthodox aspirations, and the instant transmission of diverse information outside of government-to-government channels. Even the largest successor states of the Soviet Union

are quite permeable to external influences, and unprecedented transnational and intersocietal communication has begun. Autarky and self-sufficiency are relics of the Soviet past, and many political processes in the FSU are unstable, uncontrollable, and unpredictable.

Conceptual Clarity

Simple description must be based on minimal conceptual clarity. If the general characteristics of a concept are not readily apparent, there is no rational basis on which to agree or disagree with propositions using that concept. There are no philosopher-kings who can demand terminological consistency among scholars and policymakers. But the least we can do is to employ key concepts in clear and consistent fashion in our own work. One's own thinking is usually not coherent and one's arguments rarely can be persuasive or comprehensible if one uses basic concepts such as "ideology," "role," "federalism," "nation-building," or "revolution" in ambiguous or multiple ways.

This is not to say that conceptual lucidity must come prior to data gathering and analysis. Elasticity in concept formation sometimes stimulates creativity, and sharper conceptualization often comes during or as the result of hard thinking. But I was stunned to hear a respected colleague assert nearly one year after the demise of the Soviet Union: "Let's not waste our time reconceptualizing things. Let's get on with real research." Even in the heyday of Brezhnev's "stagnation," there were enough pressures for change and puzzling events to warrant frequent conceptual tune-ups. And now, early in the post-Soviet period, we need to supplement the traditional tools of our trade and to rethink our old analytical approaches.

Two obvious reasons are the dramatic structural and behavioral changes in the FSU, as well as the greatly enhanced opportunities for field research and data gathering. For example, no Sovietologist could have been well prepared to assess the international politics of the FSU countries in the post-Soviet bloc and post-Cold War era. And no Sovietologist had good reason to master survey research and public opinion polling techniques or the introduction of computers and modern budgeting practices into fledgling legislatures.

Two less obvious reasons for analytical retooling are the increasing use of Western ideas by citizens of the FSU and the increasing activities there by Western professionals who were not trained as

Sovietologists. When Russians or Kazakhs use terms such as "human rights," "civil society," "separation of powers," or "market economy," new meanings and contexts are added. When Western advisers and entrepreneurs bring their knowhow and technologies to the FSU, novel concepts and assumptions are included. These imported shoots take root with difficulty and grow in unexpected ways in native soil. Exponential degrees of conceptual confusion and international misunderstanding often ensue, especially when there is little comprehension of one another's history and culture. Post-Sovietologists know some of these contextual factors and can facilitate the learning processes of FSU and Western citizens. But we can do so effectively only if we accelerate our own learning process. We need fresh knowledge of conditions in the FSU and much greater knowledge of our own disciplines, as well as the creativity to link the two in theory and practice.

For example, important Ukrainian and Georgian perspectives are perplexing Western businesspersons, lawyers, government officials, journalists, and academics. This is not at all surprising, because few Westerners have historically grounded knowledge of nationality issues in the FSU, and most observers were shocked by the rejection of both Soviet and tsarist nationality policies in 1991. But Gorbachev's policy of glasnost gave voice to the living languages in his country—more than 100 of them—and much of this new-found freedom was used to articulate old grievances. Also, Gorbachev and his more reformist colleagues incorporated many Western and "pan-human" concepts into official political discourse. Perestroika entailed considerable reconceptualization and reevaluation, and the decay of the Soviet polity fueled this trend in unmanageable ways. Needless to say, the disintegration of the Soviet Union dramatically accelerated institutional and cultural changes, surprising most Sovietologists and making some wish they had known more about ethnic conflicts in other countries.

Our first step toward better international and interdisciplinary communication seems obvious. We need an inventory of the concepts that have proven most useful in understanding Soviet politics, and we need another inventory of the concepts that seem most useful in understanding post-Soviet politics. Some concepts will appear in both inventories, because the disintegration of the Soviet polity, economy, and society is incomplete. Parts of the FSU have retained key characteristics of the old Soviet Union, and its legacy is having a powerful impact on the Russian Federation and the Com-

monwealth of Independent States (CIS). Also, we should include in our inventory the technical and everyday uses of key concepts in the FSU. Various Belorussian and Azerbaijani concepts of "security," "social justice," and "economic progress" are more important than ours for their future development. But the relative importance of foreign and indigenous conceptualizations (e.g., "political development") has always depended on the purpose of one's investigations and remains a thorny issue among comparativists.

It would be fruitful for professional social scientists to re-evaluate their jargon and its applicability to current circumstances in the FSU. Social science terminology can be useful, but its benefits must be demonstrable to Western and FSU professionals in various fields. What innovative concepts, for example, does the political scientist have to offer the talented Western journalist or the drafters of new Russian laws on contracts or human rights? I am not arguing for uniform application of anyone's preferred definitions, because there is no such thing as a right and wrong definition of a concept. I am merely advocating greater self-awareness about concept formation, which will deter individual scholars from using the same concept in numerous, unspecified ways in their thinking and writing, and will lead us all to more constructive debate about what is chaff and wheat in different fields of social science theory and post-Sovietology.

Here is my own attempt to clarify one key concept—"the Soviet polity." Building on John Hazard's work, I submit that there were at least seventeen core elements of the Soviet political system (a combination of defining and central characteristics, in Giovanni Sartori's terminology). I focus on the structure of the Soviet polity, all of whose fundamental features in varying degrees influenced and were influenced by the construction of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union and their eventual fragmentation. Hazard contended that "democratic forms" were subjected to totalitarian "counterweights" at various "peril points" in the Soviet political system. As he predicted, systemic change had to come at the mutually reinforcing cluster of peril points—the essence of the polity.¹

Hazard creatively compared democracy and totalitarianism and added to our understanding of both. His essentialist approach emphasized the permanent features of the Soviet political system, and it minimized adaptive (goal-seeking) and cybernetic (goal-setting) feedback—to say nothing of political decay and disintegration. But the basic characteristics of the Soviet polity all evolved considerably under Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev. For example, relations between the national and regional leaderships of the Communist Party, between the Party and governmental bureaucracies, and between the bureaucratic elites and citizenry varied significantly from 1917 to 1991. In addition to major changes in policymaking procedures, social forces, and political culture, there were dramatic changes in domestic and foreign policy at various stages.

We have much to learn about the internal and external pressures that transformed Stalinist totalitarianism and about the post-Stalinist systems that absorbed, deflected, and eventually succumbed to these pressures. A clearer conceptualization of "the Soviet polity," together with a better understanding of the structures of totalitarian, authoritarian, democratic, industrialized, militarized, and neotraditional polities, will help us to explain the sudden demise of the Soviet Union and its socialist bloc as well as the early development of the FSU in the fragile new international order.

Core Elements of the Soviet Polity

1. The top leaders' sense of infallibility
2. One-party rule
3. Concentration of power at the Party's apex
4. Proscription of factions in the Party
5. Nomenklatura and elections
6. Party domination of the soviets
7. Party symbiosis with the military
8. A powerful security police
9. A politicized judiciary
10. Party control of economic organizations and policy
11. Party control of social organizations and policy

1 John Hazard, *The Soviet System of Government*, 5th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Cf. Hazard, "The Peril Points," and Alfred Meyer, "The Soviet Political System," in Erik P. Hoffmann and Robbin F. Laird (eds.), *The Soviet Polity in the Modern Era* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 753-83.

12. Party control of educational institutions and policy
 13. Party control of science, technology, and the environment
 14. Party control of the mass media and ideology
 15. Party control of religious activities and culture
 16. Russian domination of non-Russian nationalities
 17. Male domination of females
- Others?

Theories, Models, and Explanations

This is not the place to debate the merits of particular schools of thought in the philosophy of the social sciences. But it is the place to urge all post-Sovietologists to reconsider a few basics. What *is* a theory, model, and explanation? What are their connections? Is not the purpose of all three to further understanding? A familiarity with such issues will improve research in all of the social sciences and humanities. And a reassessment of such questions, even if it produces agnosticism, will help post-Sovietologists seize new opportunities and avoid new pitfalls.

A quotation from Abraham Kaplan has stuck in my head since my graduate student days.

The word "data," it cannot too often be emphasized, is an incomplete term, like "later than"; there are only data *for* some hypothesis or other. Without a theory, however provisional or loosely formulated, there is only a miscellany of observations, having no significance either in themselves or over against the plenum of fact from which they have been arbitrarily or accidentally selected.²

Sovietologists have frequently ignored or belittled this warning. And virtually no one has confronted the dilemma of linking macro- and micro-theories. James S. Coleman affirms:

The major problem for explanations of system behavior based on actions and orientations at a level below that of the system is that of moving from the lower level to the system level. This has been called the micro-to-macro problem, and it is pervasive throughout the social sciences....

In both the analysis of [Max] Weber and that by the frustration theorists of revolution, the micro-to-macro transition is made simply by aggregation of individual orientations, attitudes, or beliefs. If, however, the theoretical problem is one involving the functioning of a social *system*, as it is in explaining the rise of a capitalist economy or the occurrence of a revolution, then it should be obvious that the appropriate transition cannot involve the simple aggregation of individual behavior.

There is, in fact, a good rationale for arguing that social theory, as distinct from psychological theory, consists of theory about the working out of various rules within which sets of persons act.³

A recent article by a major student and practitioner of Sovietology raises many of these issues. William Odom suggests that there might be mutually reinforcing linkages between middle-range theories and the traditional "macro model" of totalitarianism.

Rather than announcing that the totalitarian model had not explained [adaptive and deviant] microbehavior and declaring it invalid, as group theorists, proponents of variations of pluralism, and social historians have done, we could have held much of the macro model's perspective and at the same time explained more fully much of the microbehavior either as consistent with it or slowly eroding its applicability.⁴

Odom may well be right. But he probably could have made a more forceful case with closer analysis of the metatheory literature on macro-and micro-level linkages (such as the work of Coleman and Robert Merton). Also, it would have been more persuasive to have hypothesized rather than as-

² Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry: Methodology for Behavioral Science* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1964), p. 268. (Italics in the original.)

³ James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 6, 10, 11. (Italics in the original.)

⁴ William Odom, "Soviet Politics and After: Old and New Concepts," *World Politics*, 45, 1 (October 1992), p. 81.

sented that “the old totalitarian model could have been richly supplemented by numerous ‘theories of the middle range.’” True, Odom declared that “much,” not all, of the model could explain “much,” not all, of Soviet informal behavior, and he judiciously acknowledged that this microbehavior might be “slowly eroding [the macro model’s] applicability.” But why not also acknowledge the possible irrelevance of the totalitarian *type* of polity (not model) and its possible sudden inapplicability in various geographical and issue areas and time periods? These hypotheses would have been consistent with Odom’s conclusion that

the old system had to collapse before...a liberal development could become a serious possibility. Political decay of the old system was mistaken for development toward a new system.... [But] [t]here was no new system to model, and the old system did not stand on a continuous spectrum of possibilities ranging from authoritarian to liberal democratic. It stood apart, preventing the emergence of a new system while it decayed, unlike other *types of dictatorship* which may allow new and more effective institutions to emerge slowly to a point where the transition to a new and stable successor system is relatively easy.⁵

Ironically, Odom may have underestimated the relevance of the totalitarian construct in the post-Soviet period. The Soviet polity disintegrated; it did not dissolve. In principle, it could have spawned fifteen or more smaller totalitarian regimes; in practice, many institutions, procedures, networks, and personnel of the former regime are thriving under a mixture of old and new rules. As Viktor Bondarev concludes, “A spectre is haunting the CIS—the spectre of the USSR!”⁶

Odom has brought to his research impressive insight and rich experience. The issues he raises can be further elucidated by parsimonious and interconnected propositions buttressed by empirical evidence. How the Soviet system functioned and how its successor systems are evolving are ultimately empirical questions. But meaning can be imparted to information only through some kind of theoretical and metatheoretical orientation. The more explicit the orientation, the more likely we

will be able to generate data that support or refine it and that persuade others of its academic or practical value. For example, Odom’s use of the terms “concept,” “model,” “type,” “theory,” and “explanation” are not consistently clear. Also, Odom’s heavy reliance on the concept of “system” and his implicit emphasis on the concept of “social structure” are noteworthy. These concepts are central to well-developed bodies of social science theory that might have strengthened his analysis.

In the past, many Sovietologists used the term “totalitarianism” as post facto window-dressing rather than as part of a research design, and the term was underscored or ignored on ideological or emotive grounds. Hence, it did not matter whether totalitarianism was a concept, model, typological construct, theoretical framework, or theory. Also, Sovietologists viewed totalitarian structures chiefly as objects of deductive or macro-analysis. We insufficiently appreciated that inductive approaches and micro-analysis could help to confirm, modify, or disconfirm our assumptions about totalitarianism. Furthermore, some of us forgot that the *informal* behavior of leaders and citizens could function as an integral part of a totalitarian polity or could help to preserve its basic features by adapting them to changing socioeconomic and scientific-technological conditions at home and abroad. This insight was of course amply documented in the postwar Harvard Interview Project and has long been a central tenet of Western social science theories.

The divorce of Sovietologists from their core disciplines and from the philosophy of the social sciences has been mutually detrimental. Post-Sovietologists need to learn more about the important issues and anomalies in our disciplines and metatheory, in order to ask more penetrating questions and to generate more insightful answers. True, our multidisciplinary and policy-oriented expertise about the Soviet Union and FSU is generally good and in certain subfields impressive. And, true, post-Sovietologists may well have more to offer comparativists and social science generalists than we have to gain from them. But we will never know until we make a sustained effort to assess what is out there and rethink our analytical criteria and standards.

The current situation in the FSU and its international environment is unique, and there are now

⁵ Ibid., p. 98. (Italics added.)

⁶ Viktor Bondarev, “Nazarbaev—Prezident SSSR?,” *Kuranty*, 35 (September 1992), p. 4.

strong pragmatic pressures toward atheoretical analysis (e.g., insufficient Western funding for multidisciplinary research and graduate training, urgent economic and ethnic crises in the FSU, and the global hazards of weapons proliferation and environmental degradation in an imploding military superpower). True, unique historical circumstances demand unique practical responses (e.g., the extensive Soros Foundation assistance to new businesses and to social and natural scientists in the FSU). But unique circumstances do not necessitate unique theories and methods to explain or alter them. Innovative and traditional approaches are feasible and desirable. And both social science and area study approaches can be fruitful, serially or in combination, depending on the topic under investigation.

For example, the artificial separation between comparative and international politics in our thinking and in our university course offerings is indefensible, especially in the context of the FSU and CIS. Also, there are potentially relevant literatures in a wide range of fields (e.g., revolutions, nation-building, economic development, administrative behavior, educational reform, social psychology, ethnicity). Some of these bodies of theory are well developed, and others are merely amalgams of disparate concepts, half-baked ideas, and formal constructs ungrounded in realities. But few post-Sovietologists know which is which. And we all need conceptual, theoretical, and practical help from wherever we can get it.

To cope with the professional and even the personal identity crises that many of us are experiencing, individual or group immersion in selected social science fields should prove to be time well spent. The best that can happen is that we quickly benefit from some body of theory in redesigning our own research, and that we confirm, revise, or reject significant theoretical propositions with fresh data about the FSU or CIS. The worst that can happen is that we accumulate more information about the uncharted waters in which we are foundering. And middling accomplishments would be to assess some body of theory or quasi-theory with up-to-date information, or to gain a few possible insights about the FSU from this theory. All of these contributions are eminently worthwhile, because they enhance our understanding of complex and rapidly changing political realities and how to study them.

Diagnosis and Prescription

Post-Sovietology needs more of everything. We need more description, conceptual clarity, theory building, explanation, policy analysis, and prediction. We need more single-country and interdisciplinary research, more longitudinal and topical comparative analysis, and more regional and coalitional studies including FSU and non-FSU countries. But we just do not have the human and material resources to do a small fraction of this work now, let alone the resources to prepare future generations to do so.

The only way we can cope with the daunting scarcities of time, talent, knowledge, incentives, and money, as well as the mounting complexities of the subject matter and its policy implications, is through greatly expanded *team* research. International, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational team research is most desirable. Intranational, intradisciplinary, and intragenerational team research would constitute progress, too. The ideal of the individual scholar working alone in an office, library, or laboratory or conducting interviews on a prolonged field trip should be viewed as an historical anachronism. Two heads have always been better than one, and never before have several heads been so likely to be exponentially better than one.

International team research should include investigators from the FSU and non-FSU countries. This will probably have immediate benefits by providing Westerners with fresh information about fast-moving developments in the FSU. Not all of this information will be disinterested. But by building international networks of researchers we can disseminate pertinent information and strengthen international norms of analysis. For better or worse, Western ideas and experience are exerting enormous influence in the FSU today. Western theories and experience should not be proffered as prerequisites or panaceas, but we can often modernize the techniques and instruments of research. Also, we can help to adapt Western problem-solving approaches to the countries, issues, and personnel involved. At a minimum, such international collaboration will help future generations of FSU professionals to understand, utilize, and upgrade generally accepted norms and practices. International working groups and research institutes can be useful, but long-term linkages between important Western and FSU organizations are especially valuable.

For example, we need more collaboration of the kind that Jeffrey Hahn and Georgy Barabashev have pioneered on local politics and the changing political culture in Yaroslavl; that Raymond Garthoff has organized on the Cuban missile crisis; that branches of the United States armed forces and executive and legislative bodies have begun with their Russian counterparts; that SUNY and Soros Foundation specialists on educational reform have established with their Russian ministerial and academic colleagues; and that SUNY, Hofstra University, and American Bar Association specialists on taxation, budgeting, federalism, and separation of powers have had with drafters of the Russian Constitution (who, incidentally, showed a considerable knowledge of U.S. *state* constitutions).

Interdisciplinary team research should be among post-Sovietologists and between post-Sovietologists and specialists on other geographical areas or general topics. For instance, political scientists and economists specializing in the FSU can talk little sense without one another's help. The economic legacy of the Soviet Union binds the FSU countries tightly for the foreseeable future, but the political legacy of Soviet nationalities policy gives vent to tribal ethnic animosities as well as to unrealistic notions about nation-building. These centripetal and centrifugal tendencies are in intense competition. Only those analysts who can describe and explain this competition will be able to move beyond rhetoric about "economic rationality" and "political sovereignty" to further understanding of basic trends and events.

To take another example, we should establish long-term working groups that include post-Sovietologists and social scientists with no prior experience in the Soviet Union or FSU. Surely the specialist on legislative behavior, organization theory, role conflict, political socialization, or survey research methods can enrich study on these topics in a single FSU country. And surely post-Sovietologists can use their expertise to broaden and deepen theoretically grounded multi-country projects. At an autumn 1992 Kennan Institute colloquium on the future of Sovietology, I was struck by Gabriel Almond's lament about the "parochialism" of comparative politics. The social sciences, too, have suffered from lack of data about Soviet experience, and they will suffer more needlessly than before without collaborative efforts to compare the FSU and other countries.

For a final example, we need more interdisciplinary research among the social, natural, and policy sciences. The words "Chernobyl," "ecological ca-

tastrophe," and "nuclear proliferation" should suffice to explain why. Science-technology-society issues are a matter of life and death in most of the FSU countries. Interdisciplinary initiatives by scholars and policy analysts are urgently needed to cope with seemingly intractable dilemmas. Many of these initiatives should include international teams of specialists from diverse fields. The broader the international and interdisciplinary composition of these teams, the greater the political legitimacy and forcefulness of their technical and normative recommendations to the fractious countries and regions of the FSU.

Intergenerational team research means the extensive involvement of graduate and postdoctoral students and junior faculty in the research of senior professors. In the natural sciences and in some of the social sciences, it is not unusual for advanced graduate students to participate actively in field investigations headed by a tenured professor. In archaeology, for instance, it is common for students to go on digs with their professors. And this is the best kind of apprenticeship and mentoring. It provides a role model, a professional identity, and a sense of community. It develops motivation, problem-solving, and individual and teamwork skills. Exploitation is always a possibility, but the risk is well worth taking. Successful examples in our field include the network of historians of science led by Loren Graham, the short-lived but productive team of legal specialists and political economists organized by John Hazard, George Ginsburgs, and Peter Maggs, and especially the Harvard Interview Project directed by Clyde Kluckhohn, Alex Inkeles, and Raymond Bauer (to a much greater extent than the Soviet Interview Project, which was orchestrated by James Millar and included primarily mid-career scholars from various disciplines).

To date, Soviet and East European study centers have stimulated little team research of any kind. Too often they have been "umbrellas" for individual faculty research and other nonteaching activities. Our professors have worked as consultants, editors, administrators, and entrepreneurs and have treated their research centers instrumentally, like doctors treat hospitals. The same is true for most university graduate departments in the disciplines best represented in Sovietology, such as political science, economics, and history. The social sciences least represented in Sovietology, such as geography, anthropology, sociology, and psychology, are the disciplines in which field research is common in other locations. But until the late 1980s, on-site team investigations were virtually impossi-

ble in the Soviet Union, which in turn stunted apprenticeship and mentoring in Soviet studies as a whole.

We now have the opportunity to improve the content, comprehensiveness, and culture of our profession. An obvious way to do so would be through more and better intergenerational team research. It would upgrade the quality of university teaching and research in the short and long runs. It would help seize the greater opportunities for quantitative and survey research in the FSU. And it might reduce the gap between our formidable analytical challenges and our limited resources to meet them. A truly comprehensive research agenda is simply not possible; the best we can hope for are clusters of excellence. But surely these clusters should include young researchers whose outlook has never been limited by Cold War restraints and whose training includes advanced linguistic and computing skills, internships in regional and local governments, and a focus on grass-roots political and economic organizations and social and ecological movements.

There is, of course, no national policy on post-Sovietology in the United States or in any other Western country. The older generations still have a large say about the nature and pace of generational change. But it is worth recalling that Averell Harriman's vision underscored intergenerational cooperation in Sovietology and the mutual enlightenment of its professors, practitioners, and students. George Soros is trying to do nothing less than revitalize university teaching and research in all of the social and natural sciences throughout the FSU, thereby slowing intergenerational and interdisciplinary brain-drain. The conceptualization, energizing, and funding of post-Sovietology necessitate many smaller contributions as well, all of which would be magnified by long-term intergenerational, interdisciplinary, and international collaboration.

Concluding Remarks

I am still grateful that my graduate training was as a Soviet and East European area specialist and as a political scientist. I am also grateful that I later learned a little something about policy-oriented research and professions other than academe. But enormous breadth and depth are needed to nurture post-Sovietology, and such knowledge and skills can be developed and applied only in research collectives. Teamwork generates synergy—the kinds

of creative, practical, and motivational linkages that come from a group of professionals with diverse talents but a common goal. Such synergy can sometimes be found in government bodies, research and development institutes, and business or law firms; it is all too rare and ephemeral in universities, including their interdisciplinary and area studies institutes. The U.S. Department of State's new steering committee on the FSU, directed by Strobe Talbott and Toby Gati, could become the prototype of a synergistic organization if it receives adequate staff support.

Intellectual, organizational, and political leadership will prove decisive. If the administrators of universities, think-tanks, foundations, government agencies, and professional associations of the academic disciplines and of business and law do not exercise such leadership, the rest of us are going to continue pursuing our own limited interests in our own ivory towers. Groups of scholars must develop ambitious and imaginative collaborative research, and administrators must facilitate its funding and implementation. Sometimes scholars and administrators are one and the same person. But the scale of international, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational team research I am advocating calls for a new breed of academic entrepreneurs. They must be equally at home in the universities, think-tanks, foundations, government agencies, and professional associations of the social and natural sciences and of business and law in various countries.

Post-Sovietology can benefit considerably from new information technologies, such as distance learning, electronic mail, data banks, educational television, videotape exchanges, and computer applications in library science. Many of these highly efficient forms of information exchange are well established in the West, and a few are just under way in Russia and other FSU countries. But the normative aspects of communication are probably more intractable than the technical. The emerging problem for Western and FSU analysts is information overload and the difficulty of distinguishing between data and noise. Sovietologists were happy to obtain any interview or document. Post-Sovietologists have to figure out whom to interview among the many choices, and what the interviewee's responses mean intellectually, politically, commercially, and legally. We also have to swim in the torrent of printed information and ascertain the significance of individual items for various purposes.

To assist us in these endeavors, we must end the decades-long divorce of Sovietology from contem-

porary social science and the philosophy of the social sciences. We must debunk the notions that there is an irreconcilable conflict between post-Soviet studies and the social sciences, and that there is no need to think about the logic and functions of social inquiry. We must reacquaint ourselves with middle-range social theories and metatheories in order to explore the possibility of mutually beneficial exchange, not on the assumption that we are going to a fount of wisdom or have wisdom to impart.

The problem of linking macro- and micro-theory is no longer pressing, because we do not have any macro-theory and not much micro-theory about the post-Soviet period. The old concept of "totalitarianism" can still help us to compare different types of repressive political systems, thereby sensitizing us to key factors in the consolidation and disintegration of the Stalinist system. This typological concept may also be useful for underscoring some of the core elements and legacies of the Soviet polity as well as some of the characteristics and roots of the emerging polities in the FSU and in the republics of the Russian Federation.

But empirically grounded middle-range theories have considerable untapped potential. They can help us to interpret the masses of newly available information and to reinterpret previously available information. They might spark innovative questions and answers about the entire Soviet era, especially the New Economic Policy and the post-Stalin years. And middle-range empirical theories are vitally important in post-Sovietology, because they can guide our research on nascent political systems and subsystems that are exceedingly sensitive and vulnerable to external pressures (e.g., the global economy and information revolution) and to internal pressures (e.g., ethnic antagonisms and economic demands)—not exactly fortes of the totalitarian "model."

We now have unprecedented opportunities to try out innovative research methodologies, to work closely with talented specialists on cross-national topics, and to enlist the help of native researchers in data gathering and analysis. But the present situation may well be a window of opportunity that is closing. The fate of FSU democrats is uncertain, and on it hinges the future of increasingly open archives, interviews, and travel. Also, FSU analysts may soon temper their enthusiasm for Western social science, especially conservatives who (fairly or unfairly) reject its cultural components, criticize its practical results, or conclude that the emperor has no clothes. And Western professionals may lose

their curiosity about the FSU, especially nonacademics who have short-term commercial or pragmatic motivations and little taste for political and social instability or difficult working and living conditions.

By reducing the parochialism of post-Soviet studies, we can also reduce the parochialism of the social sciences and of comparative politics. By cooperating much more actively with analysts from other disciplines and from the FSU, we can teach one another much about our respective fields and societies. For example, a West European economist or demographer advising his FSU counterparts often gains insights into his own discipline, and I have invariably found that a trip to Russia produces keener insights into both Russian and American societies. Similarly, nonideological political scientists and sociologists in the FSU need regular international communication to benefit from and contribute to their general fields, to obtain and disseminate information about their own polities and societies, and to help conceptualize and legitimize institutional and educational reforms.

FSU professionals must play a major role (eventually, *the* major role) in developing post-Sovietology. Their weak training in middle-range social science theory and metatheory as well as in empirical methodologies and comparative analysis impedes their capability to do so. But Western social scientists can help their FSU colleagues to overcome the deadening parochialism of their Marxist-Leninist background, and we can enhance our technological virtuosity and independent-mindedness in the extraordinary "laboratory" of the FSU. This mutual enlightenment of Western and FSU social scientists has already begun, and it can progress speedily if the contextual expertise of Western and FSU post-Sovietologists is continuously sought and utilized.

Furthermore, post-Sovietologists from the West and the FSU need each other. For the time being at least, the opportunities for reciprocity and networking have never been greater. Western post-Sovietologists, in collaboration with their FSU counterparts, can test old and new theories with fresh data on the Soviet period and especially on the post-Soviet years. For instance, FSU political analysts are eagerly (perhaps overeagerly) applying the totalitarian "model" to the entire Soviet era, and are tailoring socialist, corporatist, constitutional law, interest group, and civil society approaches to current conditions. Russian economists and geographers are producing thoughtful empirical studies of marketization, regional financial and ecological

demands, public attitudes toward profit and property, electoral politics, territorial disputes, and ethnic conflicts. And Russian television and newspapers have generated revealing interviews with the creators and critics of perestroika, the leaders of the August 1991 putsch, countless regional and local officials, Patriarch Aleksii II, and even unrepentant Stalinists (including Lazar Kaganovich until his recent death).

To date, Westerners have produced many seminal books on the Soviet period, and FSU writers have produced few. Significant works have been produced by scholars who have eschewed social science and cross-national approaches, such as Stephen F. Cohen, Robert Conquest, Robert Daniels, Richard Pipes, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Adam Ulam, and by scholars who have often utilized these very approaches, such as John Armstrong, Jerry Hough, Ellen Mickiewicz, Alexander J. Motyl, Robert C. Tucker, and William Zimmerman. But all of these authors probably would agree that closer cooperation with FSU researchers is now feasible and desirable to enhance their individual and collective efforts. Except for an occasional memoir (e.g., Andrei Sakharov's), the seminal studies of the future will be the products of dialogue and debate between Western and FSU area specialists. If the patterns of the past persist, the bulk of these studies will be accumulative, atheoretical, and non-comparative, and post-Sovietology in the FSU will develop accordingly. If the opportunities of the present are seized, the new scholarship will be cumulative, theoretical, and comparative, and post-Sovietology in the FSU and the West will be fruitfully linked with each other and with the social sciences.

An intellectual and institutional history of Sovietology, especially an *oral* history in which its founding fathers and mothers expound on their aims and accomplishments, would yield valuable lessons for post-Sovietology. The early Sovietologists did not deliberately seek accumulative rather than cumulative knowledge. They did not purposefully set out to be atheoretical and noncomparative. During World War II, Sovietologists in the Office of Strategic Services developed an area studies approach modeled on the multidisciplinary analysis

of Japanese society. After the war prominent researchers, mostly from the newly established Russian Institutes at Harvard and Columbia, stressed or experimented with the idea of totalitarianism, which was of course also rooted in German and Italian experience. Furthermore, the Harvard Interview Project made a serious effort to pose theoretically relevant questions, which shaped the masses of fresh data gathered from countless Soviet émigrés and documents in the Smolensk Archive. These questions were grounded in the best social science theory of the day and explored numerous formal and informal characteristics of the Soviet polity, economy, and society. The "view from the bottom" was given more attention than the "view from the top," because of the unique sources of primary data, but thoughtful attempts were made to link the two perspectives and levels of analysis.

Ironically, the Cold War between general social science theory and Soviet area studies came *after* the death of Stalin. Sovietology and the social sciences were mired in this struggle for more than a decade, impeding our ability to understand Khrushchev's reforms. Peaceful coexistence was launched in the early Brezhnev years, to be followed by mutual benign neglect, rather than détente. Now our rudimentary methodological skills and atheoretical proclivities are perpetuating old methods, theories, and non-theories. These will virtually ensure the wholesale incorporation of Sovietological approaches into post-Sovietology unless decisive and timely action is taken, especially by our leading centers of research. But there is no need for pessimism. The common-sense suggestions outlined in this essay are all feasible at modest cost and no risk. I hope and expect that post-Sovietology and the social sciences can pass rapidly through peaceful coexistence and détente to entente.⁷

Erik P. Hoffmann is Professor of Political Science at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, State University of New York at Albany. His forthcoming book is cited in note 7 below. Professor Hoffmann's most recent book is Soviet Foreign Policy: Classic and Contemporary Issues (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine Publishing Co., 1991), coedited with Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. and Robbin F. Laird.

7 See the editors' introductory and concluding essays in Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. and Erik P. Hoffmann (eds.), *Post-Communist Studies and Political Science: Methodology and Empirical Theory in Sovietology* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

POST-SOVIETOLOGY, AREA STUDIES, AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Edward W. Walker

I do not intend to talk about Sovietology's past today. Rather, I plan to take up one of the questions I asked in my letter inviting everyone to this seminar: Is there a future not only for "post-Sovietology" specifically, but also for area studies generally, given the increasing pressures for specialization and commitment to positive, formal theory in the social sciences? The short answer I will offer is yes. I will make two arguments in defending this position: first, that area studies are not necessarily idiographic and interpretive, as is sometimes asserted; and second—and this is much the more difficult argument to defend—that there are good methodological reasons for area programs, like the one here at the Harriman Institute, to train regional generalists who have knowledge not only about a region's history, politics, economics, and high and popular cultures, but are also competent in the use of the conceptual tools and theoretical approaches available in different social science disciplines.

I turn first to the rather obvious point that area programs are not necessarily idiographic and interpretive. At the risk of considerable over-simplification, there are essentially two epistemological positions among practitioners of social "science." The first—what one might call vulgar logico-positivist—holds that the goal of any science, whether natural or social, is both to discover universal causal "laws of nature" and to derive "positive" knowledge by applying the laws of logic and mathematics, thereby deducing conclusions from a relatively parsimonious set of axioms. Social scientists, like physicists, should therefore strive to develop formalized and preferably parsimonious causal models that bring order and clarity to the messiness and

seeming chaos of social interaction. Good models, it is asserted, will allow us ultimately not only to explain but also to predict human behavior with relative certainty.

The second position, which for lack of a better term is often called interpretivist, begins with the observation that humans, unlike atoms, are self-conscious and motivationally complex. As a result, the search for the "iron laws" of social interaction and social change is hopeless. Self-consciousness makes positive prediction self-defeating (e.g., "I know I'm supposed to act this way, so I won't, just to spite the predictor"), while motivational complexity and the fact that the choices of one or a few individuals often seem to make a great deal of difference in history, confounds any effort to offer up universal laws of behavior. Indeed, subjective differences between individuals make even explanation *ex post*, let alone *a priori* prediction, all but impossible. Individual preferences are often inchoate, irrational (e.g., not non-transitive), and highly variable between types of choices (e.g., whether one is at the ballot box or at the supermarket). This is further complicated by the fact that very important subjective differences exist between entire peoples (i.e., "culture"), which puts the added burden of trying to understand different cultures on those who wish to explain and predict. In short, human motivation is seen as extremely complex and obtuse, varying with the people making them. As a result, the goal of the social "sciences" should not be prediction or even causal explanation but rather "empathetic understanding" and the description of culturally-embedded, contextual beliefs and meaning.

I actually believe that the differences between these two epistemological camps are overdrawn, but I want to take issue today with the argument that area studies are necessarily interpretive because they seem to imply that culture and subjective factors matter. To show that this is wrong is rather easy. Consider first how nomothetic and positivistic the study of American politics has become. In fact, most of the innovation in methodology and formal theory in political science has come from the study of American politics—for example, voting behavior, survey research, public choice theory, institutional analysis, and so on. Clearly, one may study a particular world region or a particular country and at the same time study iterated behavior and be entirely positivistic in approach. Moreover, one can make whatever assumptions one wants about motivation in doing so, including that all people are alike in being rational egotists of one form or another (e.g., maximizers of wealth, power, leisure time, progeny, lovers, or what have you), thereby ignoring totally subjective variations between individuals or peoples.

One can also be an area specialist and be comparative in the more traditional sense. Where we have different countries, as in the case of Latin America and now with the former Soviet Union, one can compare similarities and differences between those countries to derive causality. One can also compare different regional subunits (e.g., oblasts, U.S. states, municipal governments), ethnic or religious groups, political parties, and so on. Finally, one can compare any one of these entities at different times.

Thus, to say that one is an area specialist is to say nothing about whether one is committed to any particular epistemological position, method of inquiry, or theoretical approach. The real difficulty comes in making the methodological case not for area studies per se but for the way that area studies programs are usually structured. The position of The Harriman Institute has been that area programs should train scholars who have broad, cross-disciplinary knowledge about Russia and the territories of the former Soviet Union. It is this rather traditional view of the scholar as the regional generalist that needs methodological defense.

First, however, I should point out that the case for the area generalist can be made rather easily on pedagogical grounds. For wisdom's sake alone, a huge, continental country like ours needs to combat parochialism. Undergraduates in particular need to be taught that not all peoples are alike. Moreover, the internationalization of our economy presents us with a growing material interest in appreciating different cultures. It strikes me as rather obvious that professional pressures to specialize on very narrow topics or to adopt formal methods do not make us better teachers of other ways of life.

The difficulty comes in making the case on methodological grounds. Let me summarize my thinking on this difficult question. To return to the two epistemological positions discussed earlier, the first approach holds that the goal of any social science is the kind of "clean theory" to be found in physics. For the second, in contrast, the goal is essentially what Clifford Geertz called "thick description," that is, the empathetic understanding to which anthropologists aspire that allows one to come as close as possible to seeing social reality from the viewpoint of others.¹

There is, however, an intermediate position between clean theory and thick description that gets little attention but that I think many social scientists adopt intuitively. This third position I will call "thick explanation." The best way to begin to get at how thick explanation differs is to note that whereas the model for clean theory is physics and for thick description it is anthropology, for thick explanation (although the analogy is not perfect) it is the prosecuting attorney.

More specifically, thick explanation has the following characteristics:

First, it is problem driven. That is, like the lawyer working on a single case—say, a traffic accident or a murder—the analyst committed to thick explanation attempts to explain the single event (preferably one that is important enough to be of some interest to others).

Second, it is oriented toward explanation, not mere description—which is to say, the goal is a set of truth claims not only about states of affairs but about causality.

Third, it accepts the logico-positivist position that all explanations are based on observed regu-

1 See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). For a discussion of the difference between the two approaches, see Paul Hirsch, Stuart Michaels, and Ray Friedman, "'Dirty Hands' versus 'Clean Theory': Is Sociology in Danger of Being Seduced by Economics?" *Theory and Society*, 16 (1973), pp. 317-36.

larities—what Carl Hempel called covering laws. Trying to explain the single event therefore requires drawing empirically-derived, “synthetic” (in Kant’s language) “laws of nature,” and not simply on analytical “truths of reason” (i.e., logic or Kant’s “pure reason”). Thus, those committed to thick explanation are neither epistemologically nihilistic in holding that reality is totally subjective and that causality is meaningless, nor are they pure rationalists who maintain that we can rely on logic and reason alone.

Fourth, the goal of thick explanation is precisely explanation, not prediction, in the sense that it takes place *ex post*. This does not mean the analyst denies that in principle full explanation is also predictive. Rather it is a more prosaic matter of allowing the analyst to adduce evidence that comes to light after the event in question or that later events make clear is relevant to the causal chain. For example, it may be that an *ex-post* confession in the case of a crime or memoirs in the case of important political events help explain why particular actors did what they did.

Fifth, it accepts that any single event is always the result of multiple causes. This does not mean, however, that persuasive explanation is impossible. Rather, as is the case in a trial, the task is to sort out the causal chain and to distinguish important or interesting causes from those that are neither. In practice, this is a difficult judgment call for the social scientist who, unlike the prosecuting attorney, does not have the notion of culpable cause to guide him (i.e., the task for the prosecutor is usually to identify where cause and breaking the law are one and the same). However, some causes are clearly trivial and of little interest. For example, just as it is unnecessary in a murder case to show that a necessary condition for the murder was that the murderer’s parents gave birth to the murderer, it is likewise unnecessary to show that a necessary condition for Gorbachev’s arrival in power was that he was born. Neither should the analyst waste time demonstrating causality where it is not disputed. Again, it is usually unnecessary for the prosecutor to waste time showing why a bullet in the brain kills, just as it is unnecessary for the scholar to waste time arguing that a necessary condition of Gorbachev’s arrival in power in March 1985 was Chernenko’s death.

So too with many facts (assertions of states of affairs). That is, some relevant facts are obvious and may be stipulated (e.g., the gun belonged to the murderer, or Gorbachev became General Secretary on March 11, 1985). However, other facts may be

both important and disputed, in which case corroborating evidence is needed to convince the audience, whether it be the jury or one’s scholarly peers, that the “fact” is indeed a fact.

Sixth, thick explanation holds that *positive* proof (in the strong sense of mathematical proofs) is much too heavy a burden to bear on most interesting questions and that usually more useful is the notion of burdens of proof (e.g., “beyond a reasonable doubt,” “beyond a shadow of a doubt,” “a preponderance of the evidence”). This means that the goal of the analyst is really to persuade and convince, not “prove” positively.

Seventh, committing to thick explanation means abiding by formal or informal rules of evidence and procedure (e.g., adequate documentation). Likewise, it means being sensitive to the persuasiveness of different types of evidence. For example, testimony about observed behavior is much more reliable than testimony about states of mind, even when it comes first hand; statements made at or soon after the event are more reliable than statements made years later; hearsay is far less credible than eye-witness testimony; and testimony that seems to run counter to the testifier’s interest is more reliable than testimony that serves the witness’s interest.

Eighth, it accepts that not all people are alike, that motivation and beliefs vary, and that it is therefore often important, indeed sometimes critically important, to establish motive or prior disposition. As a result, the *verstehen* act of empathetic understanding, of trying to “understand” what was going on in the mind of someone else, including people from very different cultures, is sometimes necessary to persuasive explanation. And on occasion, this means wrestling with the very difficult problems of complex motives, of changing preferences, of perceptions and misperceptions, of imperfect information, and of culturally-derived biases, as well as with the personalities of key actors.

Finally, and most importantly, because any event is always the result of multiple causes, clean theory may be needed to support different parts of a general explanation. Like the prosecuting attorney who draws for different parts of his case on the expert testimony of chemists, physicists, psychologists, biologists, doctors, and even, on occasion, economists or political scientists, the social scientist committed to thick explanation may likewise draw on mainstream micro- or macro-economics, on collective choice theory, on game theory, or indeed on useful clean theory wherever it can be found.

	<u>Clean Theory</u>	<u>Thick Description</u>	<u>Thick Explanation</u>
Principal Goal of Research	Prediction	Empathetic Understanding	Ex-post explanation
Research Approach	Theory Driven	Data Driven	Problem Driven
Epistemological position	Logico-positivism	Interpretivism	Logico-positivism
Behavioral Assumptions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rational 2. Egotistic 3. Maximizer of specified and limited "goods" (e.g., wealth, power, leisure, security, or children) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Frequently and randomly irrational 2. Frequently and randomly altruistic 3. Motivation as varying randomly 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Usually rational* 2. Occasionally altruistic * 3. Motivation variable *
Preferences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revealed ex-ante by past behavior 2. Stable 3. Ordered and Transitive 4. A matter of taste 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hidden 2. Highly variable and unstable 3. Not well ordered, often intransitive 4. Culturally embedded 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Usually revealed ex-ante and/or ex-post by behavior 2. Stable or unstable * 3. Sometimes not well ordered and intransitive * 4. Individually variable or culturally derived *
Causality	Tendency to reductionism	Not interested	Often Complex *
Model	Physics	Anthropology	The Prosecuting Attorney

Let me conclude by saying that the great advantage of thick explanation is that it enables one to ask questions for which there may be no positive or even clear answers. We will never be able to "prove" positively why perestroika began, why Gorbachev and his colleagues chose the particular transition path that they did, or why the August coup failed. Certainly we are a long way from where positive proofs will appear on the blackboard giving us positive answers to such questions. Moreover, one can wonder whether using formal methods to try to answer these questions obscures more than it reveals. Indeed, it may well be that breadth of knowledge in the form of both an empathetic understanding of culture and competence in a variety of formal theories and disciplines makes for better (if probabilistic) prediction on many scores.

I therefore believe that, for the time being at least, the social sciences generally, and political science particularly, should hedge their bets and not allow an entire generation to become so specialized and formalistic that we all find ourselves sitting at myriad "separate tables," in Gabriel Almond's words, unable or unwilling to communicate with each other. It also strikes me that scholars with a breadth of knowledge and multidisciplinary expertise who are trained to take a disciplined, problem-driven approach to thick explanation are very well positioned both to act as intermediaries and to remind those Talmudic scholars at the separate tables that they may be talking to each other about mostly trivial things.

Finally, it is an open question whether commitment to formal methods and specialization best serves the interest of even hard "science." No one can say *a priori* who is more likely to make an important scientific discovery—the specialist or the generalist, the unconscious empiricist or the self-conscious theorist. The acquisition of knowledge is an extremely complex, dialectical discovery process

where fact acquisition, concept development, the discovery of laws of nature, and the application of logic and reason all take place interactively. There is, therefore, no "correct" balance between the search for empirical (synthetic) knowledge and the development of analytical truths. The scholar who studies the great revolutions in depth may have a great deal to say about causality that infirms or confirms existing theories, or that contributes to the development of new causal hypotheses or formal theory. On the other hand, formal theorists may successfully explain certain links in the causal chain that led, for example, to the French Revolution.

In sum, there is room for clean theory, thick description, and thick explanation alike in the social sciences. So, too, is there room for both the specialist and the generalist. Area programs like ours should therefore help those scholars who wish to resist the very considerable professional pressures for specialization and formalization. However, they should also train area generalists who are disciplined in approach and methodologically conscious. This does not mean that The Harriman Institute should go ahead with business-as-usual, that is, as if disciplinary trends were irrelevant. Rather, I believe it should be much more active, purposive, and aggressive in championing the cause of area studies generally and post-Sovietology particularly. Doing so would give both faculty and students a sense of direction and community spirit. It would doubtless help the Institute raise money. And it probably would make graduates of the Institute more marketable in academia.

Edward W. Walker is a postdoctoral fellow at The Harriman Institute. His essay "The New Russian Constitution and the Future of the Russian Federation" appeared in the June 1992 issue of The Harriman Institute Forum.

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